

ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA IN MEXICO CITY

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Warm greetings from the City of Rome to all the participants at the international conference taking place at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, celebrating the 75th anniversary of its founding.

It has not been possible for me to join you personally at this interesting international conference. Nevertheless, I want to be there with you offering thanks to our Lord for so many favours we have been granted in the past 75 years, and before, as the university did not just come into being overnight. And I would like to extend a special thank you to all those who made this idea reality through their hard work, and who opened the doors to others who in turn have supported the development of Universidad Iberoamericana into what it is today, namely a point of reference in Mexico City. I would also like to extend my appreciation to those who today are showing their commitment to university learning, and who are hopeful, because the university is a safe bet for the future. Though the present may be challenging, and when the future seems uncertain, this is the sure investment that is made at the University: a safe bet on the future of research, on the application of science, on the development of the young, on extending across future years the justice that our Latin-American countries are yearning for.

The 75th anniversary of Universidad Iberoamericana overlaps with the preamble of the World Congress of Universities entrusted to the Society of Jesus. I was fortunate enough to attend as representative of Tachira Catholic University, from Venezuela, in the year 2000, at the First Congress, which was organised in Mexico City by the generosity of Universidad Iberoamericana. Father Adolfo Nicolás led this First Reunion, and he invited us to reflect on our commitment to promoting the Faith, and to fighting for Justice as a key element in our university labours. He invited us, in true Ignatian fashion, to examine ourselves, to examine the fruits of our labours, and to evaluate whether indeed our graduates make a difference in our respective societies because they have received a well-rounded education at our university, and whether their professional endeavours and their impact on public policy decisions are truly meaningful on the side of justice. Father Nicolás further encouraged us to seek more depth, more depth in our thinking, more depth in the way we live our lives, and more depth in how we

attempt to transmit knowledge and human-focussed action onto others in this universally-orientated world. This is what makes us different: university, universality, depth, and seeking a vision that goes beyond our antiquated ways of reasoning. He also sternly called on us at that moment to link up, to create interconnections. The experience generated by Latin-American universities has been a beautiful one, and I can speak to that as I have been part of it for many years; equally so has been the impact of North-American universities, amongst others, and now we wish to establish a World Network that will allow us to greatly speed up the ongoing pace of exchanges.

The recent 36th General Congress of the Society of Jesus was a witness of that strong plea of nations for a more humane-centred way of living, for fairer conditions of life. It is for this that this Conference, as well as previous ones, starting with the 32nd, invites us to keep fighting for social justice as a key dimension of the **reconciliation** amongst human beings, and amongst peoples, and across the cultures that inhabit this shared house of ours, the planet we live on, and Nature, on which life itself depends, and which is affected itself by unjust relations that ultimately endanger life. That was the energy felt by the Congress. And it was expressed through one word – **reconciliation**. A reconciling process which also invites to Faith, and to recognising the love of the Father of all of us, brothers and sisters, who also gave us His Son, to tear down the walls of hate that divide us, and also permeate us with His Spirit, so we can walk mindfully towards the building of a free and united world, where each and every one can find a seat at the table of human dignity – this is the future towards which we desire to contribute, strengthened by that ultimate effort undertaken by Jesus on the cross, which becomes the breath that tumbles down all the walls dividing human beings, and reconciles us also to ‘Papá Diós’, as we Latin-Americans say.

It is our contribution from Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, networked with other universities in the care of the Society of Jesus, to this complex and risky attempt at reconciliation that reveals the true meaning of this celebration of 75 years, as a mouthful of oxygen for staying on the road and picking up our pace. This is what I would like to wish for all of you: that this celebration will truly breathe oxygen into the university, and that it will allow you to see this great undertaking we call university duty with renewed vision and enthusiasm.

Understanding the social structures of oppression that afford so many unjust acts, and the search for feasible alternatives to restore balanced relations and to open opportunities for dealing with poverty; policy based on democracy and a well-rounded human development that includes the conservation of the

environment as mentioned before, are germane to the mission of the university: grasping available alternatives, communicating them to others, and placing ourselves on the road that contributes to doing all these things.

For a university tied to the Society of Jesus, the challenge is comprehending reality from the perspective laid out in Gospel, that is to say, from the viewpoint that one can acquire only by serving amongst the poor of this world, as Jesus of Nazareth has done. It is also the closeness to the poor that will allow us to search for and find, as Saint Ignatius urges us, those social, economic and political alternatives which lead to opportunities of humane and dignified life for the millions in so many nations and cultures who today are being denied the rightful dignity of any human being, son or daughter of God.

The 36th General Conference also made us aware that we are not alone on this path. There are many, so many more who are also contributing to changing this world, and we can become more effective in achieving this goal by collaborating with them. I would like to reiterate that the Society of Jesus began as a small Association, a humble Society that from the very beginning regarded itself as no more than sufficient for participating in the mission of Christ as it was entrusted to the Church. The Society of Jesus never aimed to be self-aggrandising; the Society of Jesus has purpose inasmuch as it is one partner on a mission that so many of us have accepted from the Church, and from many other corners within humanity. From this fundamental identity we are invited to grow in our collaboration efforts with others, and also amongst ourselves, collaboration which we cannot say is at its best today. Working with each other is a process neither simple nor easy. The Society of Jesus as it is today, a multicultural body, stretched far and wide across the world, engaged in projects varied in scope and size, as our educational institutions happen to be, feels the weight of an enormous burden. The Society of Jesus is an association that has anchored an efficient effort for changing the world in its educational endeavours. Amongst these we find around two hundred universities, also of varied scope and size, embedded in myriad contexts. Therein lays the challenge: establishing effective collaboration across distinct university realities; collaboration that from the start assumes an eventual immense enriching of each member, and this is my heartfelt belief, because I have lived it first-hand in a humble institution on the Colombia-Venezuela border. Each university becomes enriched when it encourages the efforts of another for the same purpose, and when it is mindful of its own work towards this. This status quo requires finding the flexibility for adapting to new realities and growing within a dimension relatively new for each and every one of the universities that have developed a strong identity, and that have a tradition emanating from their

own history and the social and cultural contexts that accompanied their development.

The universities in the care of the Society of Jesus, and other university faculties of long-standing tradition in Europe, the Americas or elsewhere in the world must make of tradition not a burden, but, on the contrary, a historical account from whence springs innovative collaboration. I wish to use this opportunity to motivate you in converting the memory of 75 years into an outburst of creativity that may illuminate your thinking, and lead you to discovering new ways of collaborating within your own institution and with other universities. I am fully aware of the challenges this entails at each university, more so those that have developed a diversity as ample as Ibero has; challenges of maintaining internal co-working, of truly becoming an entity wherein one part collaborates with the equivalent part in another body.

Creativity is needed for putting novel experiences to practice, open to all the parts of the university community: students, teachers, researchers, employees, workers, authorities, alumni...The university is a complex and rich community, and every person that grows or passes through it must have the opportunity to develop as a human being within that collaboration, and through it become a part of something larger. I have no doubt that Ibero will become enriched and will share its own immaterial wealth with others that can benefit from walking on the trail blazed through by you. Creativity needed so that university efforts become a means for understanding the times we live in, and a way to collaborate in the spirit in which God keeps working in this world. This precisely is the enthusiastic invitation that Vatican II has made: let us turn towards the world, because God is working in it, and the signs of the times will help us find evidence of God's work throughout history, and it is God's labour in History through the signs of the times that we, as university people and as Jesuits, wish to open our eyes to.

These are difficult times for democracy, threatened as it is on every front. Threatened by the unstoppable expansion of inequality – and in societies that are not equal, democracy can never be strong; at risk because of the rise in all types of violence, which spreads fear within society, and culminates in terror and terrorism; vulnerable to the ubiquitous arrival of messianic messengers (the Messiah already came, and came in the flesh of a crucified pauper). Key to helping make this a better world will be the university paper in developing complete citizens, and in fostering a universal perspective by acknowledging the richness in cultural variety, and by facilitating opportunities for dialogue and exchanges.

Humanism is an essential trait of the tradition fostered by the Society of Jesus, which today has enormous validity, but also a new countenance: that marked by the challenge in contributing towards humanising this world, already wounded by the erosion of Nature, but also by the erosion of social relations, of the relations between human beings, between peoples, cultures and nations, at a time of gross inequality in access to resources, educational or otherwise, or in the autonomy necessary for making one's own decisions.

Let us be, therefore, humane. Let us be in flesh as Jesus of Nazareth was, without limits to His dedication as he planted a seed on this Earth that we, together, with creativity, and working every time more closely, seek to reap the fruit thereof. Well done on the fruits your labours have yielded in 75 years. Well done because that seed continues to be sown in Ibero's heart.

We shall meet again in Bilbao, Loyola next July. Above all, however, let us continue to see each other on this path we are making together, 'entangled', with universal vision, as one.

Curia Generalizia. 2018